

for Weisberg

19 March 1970

Howard Roffman
Philadelphia

Howard:

Fillinger interviews

V-J
I have a few comments to make about these, but first I want to say something about the limitations of your use of statements by Fillinger or an other expert in special fields. Fillinger is a genuine, hipsey-pipsy, expert in forensic pathology; you gave gold in him, and you mine it well. Add to that his integrity, and you have not just gold, but high quality gold. But even the best gold has to be purified after you have extracted it. You are obliged seriously to consider whatever F says, for he is wise in ways that we are not, and he is honest. But you must also interpret what he says in light of failure to know all that pertains to the assassination, and in the light of his unconscious bias in assuming the truth of certain things that may not in fact be so.

imp.
F is an expert in Forensic pathology, and you must consider what he says in that regard, but he is not an expert on the assassination, and you are not obliged to accept all that he says in that regard. He does not have expert knowledge on the assassination as a whole; he has, as it were, a layman's knowledge, so his comments on things that do not pertain specifically to pathological aspects may be badly faulted without your realizing it. In some cases I think this is true-- I'll point a few of those out. In any case, understand that you can override his judgment on non-medical matters, especially in instances where the judgment stems from misconstrued data.

.....

p.5... We have already been over the matter concerning the fragmentation of military ammo when it strikes soft tissue only, so I won't go into detail. As those matters apply to the case of the assassination there is no possibility for a bullet like 399 losing any fragment if it passes only through soft tissue. It is Full Metal Case, and it moves too slowly to break up without striking hard bone.

usu
Fragin
p.7... F8s definition of "high velocity" is arbitrary; the term means different things to different people, and different things in different situations. I recommend that you not use it, because it is vague, and tells nothing. ~~There are many factors~~ The on-target velocity of bullets has enormous bearing on whether the break up in soft tissue, but that is not the only factor that has bearing. I advise not using the term because there are pitfalls in it for people who don't know about firearms-- it's too vague, and just doesn't mean anything when applied generally. Fillinger knows this, as his words indicate, but you should know it too.

pll... The problem of thinking of "a lead projectile with no jacket leaving these fragments" is that cast bullets (unjacketed) normally cannot be accurately fired at a high enough velocity to go into the kind of "dust" depicted on the X-rays. Moving a bullet at great velocity requires great heat and great pressure-- both of which tend to melt cast bullets in the barrel, not a lot, but it softens them enough to upset accuracy so that you cannot count of the bullet

2

hitting what you aim at. A hollow-point filled with an explosive compound might, I suppose, produce that effect, but I see no reason for supposing that when the phenomenon can be explained in terms of normal, easily accessible, safe, and efficient ammo. I would not rule out a cast bullet, for it falls well within the range of possibility, but I think it unlikely because cast bullets are not readily available (not for rifles), and they are grossly inefficient in comparison with commercially available ammo.

p11 and 12... I am considering something potentially important in connection with the path of finely divided fragments. I am at a low stage of consideration and want to carry the matter farther into an area nearer to certainty, for presently I am working only on limited knowledge and a hunch. If the hunch proves true, then it will be very important; if not true, it is best dropped and forgotten. If things go good, I'll let you know later what I mean; presently I would like to maneuver alone and in my own way. You will not be left out if anything develops, but I probably won't mention it further if nothing does.

Mysterious, eh? It drives me wild when people write to me like that.

p.15... When F says "there's nothing here that suggests a second round", he should consider that not all of the damage was described. Much is missing, and it's more than fair to suppose that what is missing are references to things that do suggest a second round. I do not make F's assumption (p.16) "that he described everything that he saw". We know the the autopsy docs saw much that they did not describe-- all indicating another shooter-- and we know too that the Panel was working under constraints similar to those of the autopsy docs.

PH

p18ff... F's remarks about JFK head movements after Z313 do not merit serious consideration, for reasons I have previously indicated. If anybody believes that that movement can in any way be explained by a shot from the rear, he will have to show me proofs of it, not merely suggest hypothetical possibility. What he says is contrary to experience; mine and every hunter that I have talked to about this. Indeed, I think it is contrary to experience, period. If in my experience I learned that apples regularly fall down from trees, and my friends had learned the same thing by similar experience in observing apples always falling down and never falling up, I am not inclined to accept the arguments of anyone who "proves" to me theoretically that apples can fall up. My stand on this issue is that strong. Show me an apple that falls up, and I'll believe that ~~it is so~~ it is so. Until then, screw theory.

p.24... (near top) ~~xx~~ "3000" cubic feet" should be ~~#~~"300 cubic feet".

PH

p.26... Regarding what F knows and can't tell, can you reasonably take a large hint from this statement: "There are lots of items in that autopsy report that aren't there from when Humes first dictated them." The grammar is odd and not easy to interpret, but I'll bet this represents some of F's knowledge.

Humes didn't dictate them

p .27... In the same vein as ~~the~~ my previous note, I believe:
 "Suppose he was ordered by his superior officer not to include or to include certain other things which might or might not fit the theory that was presumed by the government?"

From the tenor of F's remarks generally, it appears that he prefers to be specific rather than to be vague. Keep an eye especially on those areas in which he is vague, for he seems to be talking in a way contrary to his nature.

p.29... You did not give F enough information regarding failure of autopsy docs to see front neck wound. The fault here is yours, for I think that F would not have considered it conceivable if you had emphasised what Fink said in N.O. about examining the margins of ~~the~~ the traceotomy very carefully. You did not indicate that they saw the trach. incision well enough to measure it within a half centimeter. You just did not give him all the information that is known. His answer is warranted on the basis of what you gave him, but you did not give him enough.

p30... among the best of all that F said is this: "you're stuck with a solution that you're not going to be able to find because the pieces are lost." There are gaps in information that render a final solution of the type you seek impossible. I say this not to discourage you, but just to emphasise the importance of knowing under what limitations you are working.

.....

Fillinger phone interview

p.1... I had regarded it so obvious that I ~~never~~ may never have mentioned it, but it seems impossible that JFK did not suffer rupture of a major artery in the neck. The Parkland docs describe great contusion and great hemotoma; what else can it mean. Since there are several fragments in the neck, you must suppose that there are also several tracks emanating from the point where the bullet burst. I would be amazed if that kind of ballistic activity did not cause much contusion and bleeding.

p.2... What I now say does not apply to the assassination, but only to the question whether a 399 can lose fragments from the base. F is wrong when he asserts that it cannot. Lead is exposed there; if that lead brushes against anything hard, it may lose fragments from the base. This is perhaps more likely with a bullet like 399 than with other military rounds, for it is longer than most military rounds and is fired from a rifle with a relatively slow twist, so that the bullet spins a lot less rapidly than most other military rounds. The length of the bullet and its relatively slow rate of spin make it more unstable than others. When it enters flesh, the resistance further reduces the spin, and the 399 is thereby more likely to tumble than other rounds which are shorter and spin faster. The gyroscopic effect of the spin keeps the bullet stable. When it loses spin it loses stability and may tumble. In tumbling, the base of the bullet may brush against something hard and deposit some of itself there.

p2... "Kennedy ballistics"? Surely F said "kinetic ballistics" and you transcribed incorrectly.

*agreed
to what
what*
p 4... In saying that cramped quarters work to a shooters advantage F is issuing a lot of crap which you should ignore. Nothing that he says in this passage makes any sense. I can't characterize it as anything but stupid. It may be that he had something else on his mind than what he says, but what he says is worse than ~~worthless~~ worthless. I won't try to speculate what he might have had in mind, for what he says is pure poppycock. From beginning to end.

p.5... "Now, as (the bullet) strikes, it tends not only to throw the head forward, but to spin it to the left just like a cue shot, which can create the illusion of having the head thrown backward when in fact it is rotation." Illusion! You should have gone for the throat when you heard that word, for you and I and everyone who has seen Zapruder, Nix, and Muchmore know that what happens is not illusory-- it is reality. In the films the head appears to move backward because in reality the head did move backward. Illusion, my ass! Remember too what Tink-finks tend to forget (forget?), that it is not merely the head that moves backward, it is the whole torso, and that it moves back hard enough to cause that whole great weight to bounce off the back of the seat with about the same violence as it bounced into it. That is a lot of meat and bone to be pushed back a long distance simply by the rotation of a part of the moving unit-- and from a shot delivered from the rear, at that! You must forgive me if I regularly lapse into ridicule whenever I have thrust on me the consideration that that movement can have been caused by a shot from the rear-- under any circumstances. It's just that it seems to me to merit nothing but ridicule, and to consider it otherwise gives such notions a measure of credibility that is far in excess of what they deserve. My brother, who is learning Texan, passed me a Texan phrase that covers it: "They ain't no way".

.....

I have covered mostly matters of criticism here. When I re-read the interview I may write again to tell you what's good about the interview. Don't consider that these comments detract from my overall impression that you have struck a mother lode and are mining it well. The interview contains much that was previously known from others, but it's good to have fresh statements from an honest man. Congratulations on doing an excellent job. Keep Fillinger on your stringer, for he may help you in the future in ~~xxx~~ ways you may not now be able to imagine.

Still,

Yick

cc. Weisberg

P.S. You have Harold's comments on meeting with Tom Kelly and others. Wasn't that a dandy? Do you remember that in my comments to you on Specter I said "whenever they push the panic button, we benefit"? Well, it looks like the SS is worried, for otherwise they would not have talked with Harold as they did. Worry them, worry them, worry them; the effect always brings us something good.

Press coverage of Harold's suit seems lousy, but that was not unexpected, however much it may have been wished for. Whatever you may think of corruption elsewhere, the really basic responsibility for what has happened, both in regard to the assassinations and in other regards, rests with the press. We expect military men to be warlike, ~~xxx~~ but in a good system of checks and balances they can be controlled; they live up to what we expect of them-- indeed, we have no warrant to expect anything else because generally we want them to be that way. We expect, too, that business men will be greedy for gain, and that politicians will grasp for power by any means-- that is all right, really, for as part of a good system of checks and balances they should and do act that way; they cause no trouble because we expect them to behave as they do; by behaving that way they fit properly into a system of rivalry and competition. We expect the press to be truthful, in their own interest, for the exposure of scandal and corruption sells papers; that's all in the best and justest journalistic tradition; that those who don't seek truth merely for the sake of justice and honor will seek truth anyway, for money or for other reasons. That is the way it should be.

But the press has not fulfilled what we expect of it, and this is precisely why the system no longer functions properly. The checks and balances are upset, a whole new set of circumstances prevail; in fact, we are living under a new system and merely applying to its parts the names that formerly we applied to the old. It's bad news, for we deceive ourselves badly.

When it comes right down the line to blaming who is responsible, I do not blame those who shot Kennedy, I do not blame Warren and the Commission, I do not blame Specter and his ilk, I do not even blame J. Edgar Hoover. I blame the press.

I have Howard's 15 March letter to you re Fillinger and concur with most of his comments.

I really have to stop now. I'll try to write again soon